

The Taj Mahal itself is a beautiful building that we are sure the reader can picture. What you may not realize is that part of the beauty is enhanced by playing tricks with your eye. The minarets at the four corners seem to stand perfectly parallel and very tall. They actually lean outward just a few degrees for a more pleasing effect (and also so that in case of earthquake they will fall away from the Taj rather than onto it). The walls of the Taj lean outward also, and the Arabic writing on the Taj is larger at the top than at the bottom. The result gives the appearance that the building is perfectly regular when it is not. There are signs up that say "no tipping" but that did not stop a would-be guide from latching on to us. We tried to break away but could not. Our guide took us through the building, showing us that the marble and the red stone used in floral decorations was translucent. We don't know how that did any good since there is not very much light that gets into the Taj. It seems like wasted effort. It also had black marble from Belgium and white marble from Jaipur. The building is, of course, a huge mausoleum that the Emperor Shah Jahan built to memorialize his wife, Mumtaz Mahal. She may well have been an extraordinary woman in life. We will probably never know. But the Taj was not started until she died and it took 20,000 laborers twenty-two years to complete, at a cost of 22,000,000 gold rupees. We don't know how much that is in American. At the current exchange rates, Rs22,000,000 is about US\$700,000. It took so long that by the time it was complete, Mumtaz was a very ordinary skeleton. There is a phony mausoleum on the floor where you enter and a real mausoleum on the floor below. Perhaps the Emperor thought this would fool grave robbers. Anyway, the Taj is one of the Seven Wonders of the World. I asked about this and Mark explained that it was so chosen by the 1921 Seven Wonders Conference that met in Florence, Italy, and has remained on their "Top Seven" list every year since but one. Mark also said, "It is also world-famous as a tribute to excess and wealth. As a tribute to beauty that will last the ages it is second in India only to the works of Ramanujan, the great Indian mathematician."

Well, we came out of the Taj. We walked back along the reflecting pool, trying occasionally to take pictures. There were good photo points, but there were always queues of people waiting to take pictures there. Someone wanted to open a fenced-off area for Mark to take pictures from. No doubt it was for baksheesh. Mark refused.

As we were leaving, Mark got a look at an Indian chipmunk. At least he thought it was a chipmunk. It had the markings of a chipmunk, the tail of a squirrel, and a size somewhere in between.

The Taj is near the juncture of two rivers whose names mean "stop" and "go." They feed the fountains which Mark thinks the guide said had run continuously since the Taj was built.

Just as Delhi had a Red Fort, so too did Agra, built by Akbar the great Moghul emperor. When he was just twenty-three years old, he ordered the fort built. That was in 1565 and the high walls of the fort were built of red sandstone. Three years earlier Akbar had started his conquest of northern India. Akbar won the loyalty of the people with a carrot and a stick. The carrot was tolerance for Hinduism; the stick was military force. Akbar avoided making enemies by not insisting on conversion to Islam.

It took three or four thousand workers eight years to build the massive walls. The walls are supposed to be so well constructed that no hair can go into one of the joints. The buildings inside the fort were changed many times since then, but the walls are still intact. The walls go up as much as seventy feet and the perimeter makes a curve one and a half miles long. It seems larger than the Red Fort in Delhi, but parts of this fort are reserved for army use.

The inside includes the Pearl Mosque (Moti Masjid). It was built from 1646 to 1653. It was also closed for renovation (Luck of Leeper, but Evelyn couldn't have gone in anyway). The fort affords a nice view of the Taj, but of course that was the plan when the Taj was built. There was more sandstone work, more inlaid work, and so on. They are restoring some of the buildings with a new coat of plaster and trying to fix up the gardens, but it is difficult with as little money as is probably available. (They are also building a new, wider bridge across the Yamuna that they've been working on for six or seven years and it looks only half done. Evelyn figures they'll finish the new international airport in Agra before either of them. The tourists will then fly directly to Agra instead of day tripping from Delhi. It will probably be real hell then.)

One of the women on the day tour was from south India and she was fascinated by Mark's palmtop computer. This was the first day he was using it to make notes and both she and her son with whom she was traveling were fascinated to see the new technology. Even the guide, an old dark-skinned Indian man, started addressing his lecture directly to Mark. It may be he figured the rich American could tip best. On the other hand, no one seems to tip the guides on these tours anyway.

Both here and in Delhi the guides told us wherever we see that something has been plucked out of the wall, it had been a jewel before, almost always a diamond or a ruby. Mark thinks it makes for a better story, but he is not sure he believes that there was nothing semi-precious that was since stolen. There may be some exaggeration to tell us of the great and regal past which might have been a little less great and regal than people want to imagine.

After the tour of the fort, the rest of the tour was going to crafts places. We split off and hired a cycle-rickshaw for Rs15 to go back to our hotel. As we were riding, the rickshaw driver's brother came along in a cycle-rickshaw and offered to take one of us, still for the same price. (This was for their benefit, since there was a fair amount of uphill pedaling.) We hesitated, but finally agreed on the theory that if they started going in very different directions, we could always jump out. We had them stop at the Agra Fort railway station (not the same as the Agra Cantonment railway station we had started from) and we

reserved our places for the ride to Jaipur at 6:10 AM Saturday. That was pretty painless. It supposed is a two-step process, one to get the reservation and one to get the ticket, but that seems to have been collapsed into one. We got a reservation slip to fill out, got the train number for it from a sign painted on the wall (we guess schedules don't change very often), filled in the form, went to the window, and paid and got our tickets (Rs236 each for first class for 208 kilometers including a Rs15 reservation charge and a Rs15 service charge) in about ten minutes. This was much faster than the Lonely Planet guide indicated. (It was also about 30% more expensive, but we had heard that Indian railways had raised their rates in an attempt to lose less money--it is heavily subsidized by the government.) On the back of the ticket is an inspirational quote from Gandhi and a request that family and friends not come to see you off because it makes the stations and platforms too chaotic.

Then we continued on back to the hotel. It was very slow. Evelyn said she had never seen such lethargic rickshaw drivers.

"You have children?" we were asked.

"No children."

The rickshaw driver said, "I have five children. One with polio. You know polio?"

Somehow we knew this was not going to be an easy ride.

"You want to see craft shop."

"No."

"Craft shop has many nice things."

"No room in our luggage."

"If I take you to see craft shop, I make Rs20. Just look around. Five minutes. You don't have to buy."

We said we did not want to go, but we were trapped in the rickshaws and they kept wheedling. Eventually we said we would go for five minutes. (Evelyn suspects the reason for putting us in two rickshaws was so that when they started pestering us to go to this shop, we would be unable to discuss it with each other or help each other out. Divide and conquer, in other words.) So we went. And we didn't buy. Mark used the time to good advantage. There were paintings of Hindu deities and he had the clerk give him a short lecture on Hindu deities and historical people.

Then back in the rickshaw.

"Just one more store."

"No," Mark responded.

"One more, you don't have to buy."

"NO! I will not get up from my seat until I see Sunrise Hotel. I do not rise until Sunrise."

"Just one more...."

"I am being kidnapped." [-mrl]

Migrating Our Desktop--No, It's Not Automatic (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Our old iMac died while we were on vacation (which in itself is weird--why would it choose exactly that time to quit?). We were using Apple's Time Machine backup, so everyone said migration to new hardware would be almost automatic. Hah!

First, we started the migration, but then the Mac said it needed to install some upgrades. After this it re-started the migration, but we had to pick a different user name. We did this, and then discovered that both user names were active, and if we logged in with the old one we could see *our* files, but not the system files (library, iTunes, etc.) that were under our home directory. If we logged in using the new user name we seemed to be okay, with everything readable and owned by us and the same home directory name, except for the annoying "2" in the UNIX prompt.

However, this also meant that when we re-shared our files over our network, the credentials on the netbook gave us the *old* user id. Changing this took several tries (not to mention looking up how one does this in the first place, since we hadn't done it in a couple of years!). Even after doing the edits, a reboot of the netbook was necessary--this may be obvious to some, but not to someone who does this every couple of years. (And every time we tried something and it failed, it left us with a file on

the Mac that we had to remove and then restore from backup.)

Now the real fun began.

"Why doesn't right-click work?" It turns out that this was merely the first of many settings that were **not** migrated. Googling eventually found the answer: System Preferences->Mouse & Trackpad.

"Why do I keep jumping all over the place in my documents and spreadsheets?" This has to do with mouse scrolling, but changing the "natural direction" option in System Preferences->Mouse & Trackpad didn't help. **This** mouse option was buried in System Preferences->Accessibility->Mouse & Trackpad.

"What happened to my scroll bars?" Yet another preference location: System Preferences->General Preferences.

"What happened to my crontab?" Gone, baby, gone, unless you happened to save a copy in your directory. Luckily we had and could restart it from that.

"Why can't my netbook see my files on the Mac?" Well, two reasons. One, we had to re-enable sharing for our files on the Mac: System Preferences->Sharing. And then we had to reboot the netbook to pick it up. After that, we also had to re-create all our shortcuts to folders on the Mac if we wanted to have shortcuts that worked.

Oh, and while we're at it, **every** time we bring up System Preferences, the Mac lands us on the iCloud page, which has a little red square with a "1" in it, indicating there is something it wants us to set. I have no flippin' idea what it is, and it gives me no clues. But it means we always have to back-arrow to get the primary system preferences panel.

Also, just about every application, when I start it the first time, tells me, "This application is not optimized for this Mac." This doesn't surprise me; why (or how?) would a 2006 version of Microsoft Office be optimized for a 2018 machine? But "contact the developer" is a fairly useless suggestion.

iTunes was a total reload. The biggest problem with Time Machine (at least on the old machine) was its tendency to decide to back up all 180Gb of our iTunes directory every week or so. This filled up our 3Tb backup drive ridiculously fast, so we disabled Time Machine backup for iTunes and backed it up manually. This meant we had to reload everything (time-consuming, but not difficult). We did lose all the radio stations (we still cannot manage to fix that--it's possible that the new version of iTunes does not support them), and all our playlists, which seemed like not really a big loss for us--except that Mark's iPod decided to go flakey less than a week later, and had to be reset to the factory settings, meaning everything had to be reloaded. Luckily most of his playlists were identical to albums, so it wasn't **too** bad. I am not sure having it all backed up in TM would have helped as one of the few files TM didn't save was the iTunes XML file (which apparently doesn't even exist in the new version. [-ecl])

THE PREFECT by Alastair Reynolds (copyright 2007 Ace Science Fiction, 2011 Tantor Audio, 563pp paperback, 19 hours 43 minutes audiobook, narrated by John Lee, ISBN 978-0-441-01722-5, ASIN B004PYWMKS) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

Earlier this year, Alastair Reynolds' latest novel, *ELYSIUM FIRE*, was published. *ELYSIUM FIRE* is a sequel to Reynolds' 2007 novel *THE PREFECT*. As I am a fan of the works of Alastair Reynolds, and I wanted to read *ELYSIUM FIRE*, it seemed to me to be high time that I finally got around to reading *THE PREFECT*.

THE PREFECT takes place in Reynolds' Revelation Space universe, and in fact take place before the novel *REVELATION SPACE*, the first novel published in the universe. It's not really a prequel per se, but one of the drawbacks is that the novel gives the feeling that the reader should have already read the other Revelation Space novels, as most of the entities, aliens, constructs, and terms of the universe are assumed to be known. There is some explanation of terms, but this explanation is minimal. On the one hand, that can be irritating to readers new to the Revelation Space universe, but on the other hand it is somewhat refreshing that readers are allowed to puzzle out what some of these things are.

The setting is the Glitter Band, a group of 10,000 habitats that orbit the planet Yellowstone in the Epsilon Eridani system. Those who have read other Revelation Space novels will recall that the Glitter Band was devastated by something called the "melding plague". The prefect of the title of the novel, Tom Dreyfus, is a law enforcement/police officer with an organization called The Panoply, a group charged with protecting the residents of the Glitter Band (the odd thing about this is that early on in the novel high ranking prefects claim that the group is not a police force, but in reality they are just that). The Glitter Band is run as what appears to be the closest thing to a true democracy, as all decisions affecting residents of the Glitter Band are voted upon using a device called a polling core, a computer of sorts that transmits the queries to the populace and tallies the votes. The majority wins. Until it doesn't.

Dreyfus has just returned from a mission to one of the habitats wherein he and his deputy prefect Thalia Ng were

investigating a voting fraud crime when he's sent to investigate the destruction of one of the habitats of the Glitter Band and the 900+ people that live there. What he finds there are more questions to be answered than he was originally prepared to ask.

Meanwhile, a bug in the polling core software has been discovered. Thalia, being an expert in such things, codes and tests the fix herself, and plans to test the implementation by hand installing the fix on four of the most problematic habitats, after which, if all goes well, she'll go back to Panoply and patch the remaining 10,000 or so polling cores remotely.

The two seemingly different and unrelated set of events end up pointing to a sinister plot to take over the Glitter Band by an enigmatic entity that isn't even alive in the sense that we know it. Dreyfus and the rest of the prefects on Panoply must race to stop this takeover from happening.

THE PREFECT is the kind of novel a lot of us grew up reading, the kind of novel with big ideas, interesting and somewhat way out there technologies, some altered reality in the form of something called the abstraction, which also allows people to communicate. It is huge sense-of-wonder stuff with some big ideas in a space opera setting; like I said, the kind of novel a lot of us grew up reading.

Which tends to mean, and it certainly means it here, that this isn't a character-based story. Rather, the characters are there to advance the plot and showcase what the future could be like. That's certainly contrary to the way a good deal of award winning and critically acclaimed science fiction is written today, but...it's comfortable and entertaining. You're not going to fall in love with any of these characters, but that's not the point of a novel like this. If you like big ideas and complex plots, then this will be right up your alley. It certainly was right up mine.

Speaking of comfortable, I became captivated with John Lee's voice while listening to a number of Peter F. Hamilton novels that he narrated. I normally don't check the narrator of an audio book until the end when I'm preparing to write a review. Lee's voice sounded familiar enough that I had to check on where I'd heard it before. I enjoyed Lee's narration on the Hamilton books, and I certainly enjoyed it here. The combination of the comfort food of a good space opera with the comfort food of a narrator I like from another set of novels by a different author--something I hadn't encountered before--made this a thoroughly enjoyable listen. [-jak]

A SKINFUL OF SHADOWS by Frances Hardinge (copyright 2017, Amulet Books, \$19.99 hardcover, 416pp, ISBN 9781419725722) (excerpt from the *Duel Fish Codices*: a book review by Gwendolyn Karpierz):

There are several reasons why I don't, unlike *Duelist Fish Joe*, write a review for every book I read, and I mention them from time to time. Here comes another: I read a vast amount of young adult fiction, which I feel that most people consuming my reviews are uninterested in. Perhaps this is a misinformed, sweeping generalization, but I do feel a little awkward about writing YA review after YA review for a bored audience. The--hold on, let me look up the full name--World Science Fiction Society Award for Best Young Adult Book is my excuse to break away from that for a hot second, particularly since Evelyn explicitly asked me if I was going to do it. Ah, yes... now you are in my trap.

Every once in a while I take a moment to pause and try to consider why exactly I read so much more YA than adult fiction these days, despite being sufficiently old enough to have "outgrown it." (I seriously think I read more advanced novels when I was in elementary school than I do now.) I don't think it's that YA is simpler, per se, I think that's unkind and unfair; it can be just as complex, when it puts its mind to it. Also, I dislike simple writing styles and prefer something much more elaborate and flowery. And certainly there is a lot of drivel--the number of book blurbs I read, see even the slightest hint of a boring love triangle, and toss aside is occasionally truly astonishing--but I find myself far more frequently attached to the tales told in YA novels than those aimed at an older audience.

I think it's this: YA novels are often kinder. This feels like a strange thing to say, having just finished *IN OTHER LANDS* (see previous review), which was incredibly painful, and *THE ART OF STARVING* (see next review), which was very harsh, and *THE CRUEL PRINCE* (I loved this book more than I have loved a lot of books in a long time, but I did not write a coherent review for it), which literally has 'cruel' in the title. It's weird, too, because the cruelty of YA novels is often much more personal. It hits a lot closer to home. No--maybe this is why I like it. Because it tells *my* stories. Is that selfish? Maybe. But adult fiction--wait wait wait wait wait. Hold up. I went to look up if there was a better term than "adult fiction" and I found this really good blog post by Chuck Wendig (a hero writer of mine) about YA: . Here's an important excerpt on my point:

"Young adult stories are encouraged to deal with some heavy shit when needed. Suicide, racism, misogyny, teen pregnancy, depression, cancer, rape, school shootings, and so forth. Don't feel like it needs to be all cushy and cozy and given over to some Hollywood notion of what it's like being a teenager. Sometimes YA books get called "children's fiction," which makes it sound like it stars characters looking for their next cotton candy fix while trying to stop the playground bullies from stealing their truck toys. Young adults still deal with some particularly adult things."

So like I said--it's weird to describe YA as being *kinder* when it so often is, in fact, not. And because they're so personal, they pack way more of a punch. But I think YA deals with these things in a more tender way. Knowing that they're so

personal to the reader, so present, these stories approach these topics very aware that they're about to break their readers' hearts, and try to (usually) give them something to help them bounce back. 'Here,' they say, 'we have destroyed you utterly--but not all hope is lost: This is what else could be.' Much adult fiction works in more sweepingly broad conflicts and has no concern whatsoever for what the reader feels about it. Or, perhaps, it is trying harder to *tell* the reader what to feel about it. In THE EXPANSE novels, for example--side note that these are some of my favorite adult fiction out there right now and this is not at all a complaint--know exactly what they want their readers to think about each and every character, and is pretty good at encouraging them to feel as such. Adult fiction says, 'This is meant to be epic. We know what we're doing.' YA says... 'This is for you. You probably don't know what you're doing yet, but that's okay. Nobody does.'

Obviously this is not always true. And maybe I'm making it too complicated--maybe the truth of it is simply that I feel more connected to teen conflicts (despite the fact that sex, drugs, and drinking were never really my cup of tea). I'm a very emotional person; as are most teenagers.

Now that I've rambled about YA for 800 words, I suppose I should get to the actual review. A SKINFUL OF SHADOWS, by Frances Hardinge, is the first novel I read for this Not-A-Hugo category, and secretly I rambled for 800 words about YA because I don't have a lot to say about this book itself. The novel follows Makepeace, a girl raised in a Puritan town by her mother, who is absolutely and completely determined to be certain that Makepeace can repel ghosts seeking to invade and inhabit her mind (no matter the tribulations this puts Makepeace through). Why is this so important to Makepeace's mother? Well, we find out after Makepeace is deemed mad by her mother's family and sent to live with her father's, at Grizehayes, where ghosts are a much more sinister and yet more prized presence in everybody's lives. Makepeace quickly learns that she desperately wants to escape this cage she hoped would be a home, and determines to do so with her new older brother, all in the midst of a war between Parliament and the king.

This is a really solid book. That's all I can honestly think to say about it. I liked it. I didn't love it, but I can't at all put my finger on why--nothing was *wrong* with it, it was well-written, it explored questions of trust and family and redemption, and what's important in war, and it cleverly used its characters to inform the solutions to conflicts. Makepeace was an enjoyable lead, her and her closest friend Bear, but she didn't resonate with me on the level I have come to expect from my YA, I think. Perhaps she was just a touch younger than my usual YA range. Maybe the setting was just a little too historical to hold my particular interest. Would I recommend this book to a young adult? Absolutely. It's very solid, a resourceful heroine, a great story for any younger reader. Would I read it again? Probably not. I don't regret reading it the first time, though, which doesn't sound like a ringing endorsement, but when your to-read stack is insurmountable, anything you don't regret reading is a win. [-gmk]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Here are my comments on the Retro Hugo Award Best Novella finalists:

"Asylum", by A. E. van Vogt (Astounding Science Fiction, May 1942): I'm sorry, but I just cannot get into Van Vogt. It is probably his writing method; as expressed in an interview with Jeffrey Elliot, Van Vogt explained, "I write my science fiction in eight-hundred-word scenes. Each scene has five steps." [Science Fiction Review #23] The underlying idea of this story might have been interesting, but so much stuff was piled on that it became tedious.

"The Compleat Werewolf", by Anthony Boucher (Unknown Worlds, April 1942): This is a fun piece. There is not a lot of philosophy or social commentary or complicated science, but rather an enjoyable and entertaining work. One wonders why this was never made into a film.

"Hell is Forever", by Alfred Bester (Unknown Worlds, August 1942): I read this in the Bester collection STARLIGHT: THE GREAT SHORT FICTION OF ALFRED BESTER, and found two mathematical errors. When I went to show them to Mark, I pulled up the original publication in "Unknown Worlds" and discovered that they were not in that version. One seemed to be a typo of sorts:

"Unknown Worlds": "Ha!" cried Dagon. "Onomancy -- C, third letter -- H, eighth letter -- and so on. Take total sum. Double it and add ten. Divide by two, then sub-tract original total -- "

STARLIGHT: "Let's try Onomancy," Dagon said. "C, third letter, H, eighth letter, R, eighteenth letter, and so on. It's all right, Belial; spelling isn't the same as saying. Take total sum. Double it and add ten. Divide by two and a half, then sub-tract original total.

In both cases, after some calculations, another demon says, "I can't understand it. We always get five."

Well, in the original, that is true. X doubled, plus 10, halved, with X subtracted, is 5. But the rewrite/reprint divides by two and a half rather than two, and this breaks everything.

Similarly, we have:

"Unknown Worlds": "Do you want to probe the emotions in classical order? I can take you to a dimension of twenty-seven planes where one by one, seriatim et privatim, you may exhaust the intricate nuances of the twenty-seven primary emotions -- and thence go on to infinite combinations and permutations. Come, which will you take?"

STARLIGHT: "Do you want to probe the emotions in classical order? I can take you to a world of n-dimensions where one by one, you may exhaust the intricate nuances of the twenty-seven primary emotions -- and thence go on to combinations and permutations to the amount of twenty-seven raised to the power of twenty-seven. Mathematicians would say: 27×10^{27} . Come, which will you enjoy?"

While it is good that he corrected the claim of infinite combinations and permutations, twenty-seven raised to the power of twenty-seven is 27^{27} . And the number of possible combinations would be 2^{27} (that is, each of the twenty-seven can have two states, present or not present). Permutations are more complicated, and I would need to know what was meant by the word in this context.

I have no idea when or why the text was changed, or how much of the rest of it was changed, but in these two instances, it was not for the better. One conclusion a voter could draw is that reading the Retro Hugo finalists in reprint collections or anthologies may not be the same as reading the original. I admit that the re-writing of stories is not common, but it is something to be aware of. (Both these changes were retained in the 2000 collection REDEMOLISHED, probably because Bester was no longer around to approve any further corrections.)

As a novella, this is really five short stories with a framing sequence (like Dan Simmons's HYPERION or several of James Michener's works). One does not see this often in works shorter than novels, but the framing story is substantial enough to make it a unified whole. It reads a bit like a "Twilight Zone" episode (this is not a bad thing).

"Nerves", by Lester del Rey (Astounding Science Fiction, September 1942): I started this in the 1956 novel version and the first chapter just about drove me up a wall.

Talking about the area around the atomic plant that is the scene of the story, the narrator (or perhaps the main character) thinks, "Behind the tract lay a great tract of barren land, stretching down a brackish little stream to a swamp farther away. That, at least, was useful, since it served as a dumping ground for their wastes." What?!!

"He let himself in the side entrance, palming his cigar out of long habit, though he'd had the 'No Smoking' signs removed years ago..."

And the doctors are really pleased that the nurse "bullied" a woman claiming radiation poisoning into giving a blood sample, and then one says, "At least there's a chance then. If that's it [leukemia], we can get a specialist to scare her with the facts. She ought to jump at the chance to ditch her lawyer for free treatment." Great--not only does medical treatment apparently cost a lot, but they're willing to use extortion by basically telling this woman that she will die unless she drops the lawsuit.

Well, it turns out that none of this is in the novella version, so I cannot down-rate it for them, but I have to wonder what del Rey was thinking when he wrote this stuff.

"The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag", by John Riverside (Robert A. Heinlein) (Unknown Worlds, October 1942): This story used yet another Heinlein penname, one that I was previously unfamiliar with. Heinlein seemed to use these to avoid over-exposure as opposed to having different personae for different styles, since (unlike John W. Campbell) he reverted to his real name whenever anything was reprinted. So after a while, his characters all seem familiar, whether they are in "Future History" science fiction, science fantasy with unknown sciences, or straight fantasy.

In "The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag" the main characters are a private detective and his wife, who are asked by the title character to find out what he (Hoag) does during the day--when he was recently asked what his profession was, he realized he had no idea. As they do this weird things happen, and one finds oneself in a very atypical Heinlein story (Dale Darlage claims it seems more like Philip K. Dick than Heinlein). The unusual underlying premise sets this apart from most of Heinlein's other works, but whether it elevates it above them is harder to say, since the style and characters are not noticeably different. One wonders what this would have been like if the detectives were Nick and Nora Charles, or Tommy and Tuppence Beresford. (Neil Walsh does compare the to Nick and Nora, so I may be thinking of the couple as portrayed in the films.)

"Waldo", by Anson MacDonald (Robert A. Heinlein) (Astounding Science Fiction, August 1942): After a while, one gets tired of reading Heinlein work after Heinlein work. No matter what pseudonym he used, there is a certain sameness to the style, unlike John W. Campbell's markedly different style when he used the penname "Don A. Stuart" instead of his own. Then again, as I noted above, Campbell used different names depending on the style; while Heinlein did so mostly to avoid flooding the market.

In "Waldo", Heinlein takes so long to get to the point, you want to strangle him. After he blithely discards Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle as having been disproven in the future (where they still have polio, though), he does a lot of hand-waving to try to make magic scientific--and fails. I prefer my magic as magic, and my science as science. Oh, and his characters--you want to strangle them as well. All of them. Even Grandpa Schneider with his funny way of talking. (I assume he is supposed to sound like he is old Pennsylvania Dutch or something.)

Rankings: "Hell is Forever", "The Compleat Werewolf", "Nerves", "The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag", no award. "Waldo", "Asylum"

[-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

No experiment should be believed until it has been
confirmed by theory.

--Sir Arthur Eddington

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